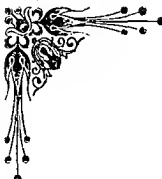


1205



REPLY

TO A

COMMUNICATION

FROM MITCHELL HINS DILL, ESQ., AND OTHERS,

OF KALAMAZOO,

CONCERNING THE COMPARATIVE RATES OF TRANSPORTATION OF FREIGHT
OVER THE MICHIGAN CENTRAL RAIL ROAD, AS CHARGEABLE TO
KALAMAZOO, AND TO NILES, UNDER THE FREIGHT TARIFF,
ESTABLISHED TO TAKE EFFECT ON THE
TWENTIETH DAY OF AUGUST, 1848.

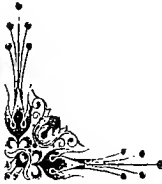
BY J. W. BROOKS,

Superintendent and Engineer.

DETROIT :

PRINTED BY MUNGER & PATTISON.

1848.



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NOTE.

In making this reply, it seemed necessary to review and consider the general policy upon which that Tariff is founded, for the purpose of showing the reasons and motives which governed in its adoption ; and it has therefore been deemed proper to present it in this more convenient form, for the consideration of others who may also feel interested in the subject.

R E P L Y .



Michigan Central Rail Road Office, }
Detroit, August 18th, 1848. }

Messrs. MITCHELL HINSDILL, L. MOFFAT and others, KALAMAZOO

Gentlemen :

I respectfully submit the following remarks in reply to your communication received on the 13th inst., concerning the tariff of reduced rates chargeable for Freight over this road, which has been established to take effect on the 20th inst.

The cost of the Michigan Central Railroad, when completed according to the requirements of its Charter, will not be less than six millions of dollars. To make ten per cent. annual dividends upon this large amount of capital, which dividends are equal to those of similar enterprises in the Eastern States, will require six hundred thousand dollars of annual nett receipts. The annual expenses of operating the road in obtaining this nett amount, aside from the depreciation of the permanent way, structures and working stock, and without any allowance for increasing the working stock or enlarging the business accommodations of the road, cannot be less than three hundred thousand dollars, and if a very considerable amount

of the receipts has to be obtained from sources where competition reduces the rates below a fair price, much more business would have to be done, and the cost of operating, though not increased in proportion to the increase of business, would be considerably greater.

The operating expenses are properly divisible into two parts—that which is, and that which is not materially affected by the increase of business.

It is sufficiently accurate for the present purpose to state, that the cost of the renewals of the wooden part of the superstructure and bridges, arising from decay, the repairs of injuries to bridges, culverts, and other water ways, as well as injuries to cuts, embankments, and road-bed, caused by the action of the elements, the repairs of buildings and a considerable proportion of the expenses at stations along the line, together with some other items of a similar character, will amount to about one hundred thousand dollars per year, and constitute that portion of the necessary expenditures which are but insensibly affected by the increase of business done upon the road.

It will therefore be perceived that when business offers which cannot be obtained except at very low rates, by reason of competition or other causes, in order to determine whether any advantage can be derived from doing such business, at the rates which can be had for it, the estimate for the real cost of

doing this additional amount must be put down at about two thirds the average cost of the whole business of the road, when if the price which can be obtained exceeds this, though it falls *below* the average working expenses upon the same amount of business on the whole line, a profit will nevertheless be obtained.

This, the true method of calculating the value of contingent business, should be kept in view, and put in practice whenever occasion offers; for though its profits may be small, whatever they are, they go so far to increase the ability of the company to reduce the rates, and cultivate an increase of their local business.

It appears that there is required, to pay the current expenses of operating the road and such a nett per cent as other successful roads pay, and such as this was yielding upon its cost when purchased by the company, the sum of nine hundred thousand dollars as the gross annual earnings. When the road was purchased with its invested capital of two millions of dollars, we found it yielding a gross revenue of four hundred thousand dollars; it is therefore evident that some economy in management will be required to pay as well upon the six millions of capital with gross earnings of only nine hundred thousand dollars.

From what sources is this large amount to be derived?

The local Passenger and Freight Receipts from

Detroit to Kalamazoo are not expected to yield more than four hundred thousand dollars ; the late reduction of rates probably amounting to quite as much as the natural increase of one or two years.

Extending westward from Kalamazoo, the local receipts will not be likely to amount to more than twenty-five thousand dollars, before we come to a district of country having other means of transportation, with which we must compete at low rates or not at all.

Taking this at the highest rates which can be charged we shall find it to yield probably not far from seventy-five thousand dollars.

Were the whole local charges put down to the rate found necessary to get the last mentioned receipts, we should find most likely that they would amount in the aggregate to less than four hundred thousand dollars, and thus the company would be found with less gross earnings by over twenty-five thousand dollars, and with greater expenses, than if they had not made the attempt to get the last seventy-five thousand dollars of receipts.

But conducting the business as all similarly situated roads are conducted, we have still but five hundred thousand dollars of receipts, and are forced to look for the remaining four hundred thousand to the theatre of still stronger competition—the country west of Lake Michigan.

This latter amount is so much a matter of uncertain contingency, that to make estimates upon it would seem like calculating on the results of untried experiments ; it is not sufficiently relevant to the matter in hand to say more upon it than that all can readily see that it is not likely to produce any thing like such an amount, and that before the full amount required by their Charter be invested, their whole business must materially increase or the company receive less dividends for the intervening time than such works usually pay.

The sum total of the expenditure and outlay in this enterprise is thus shown, and it is expected to yield only a just and fair equivalent or compensation—such as all business men will decide to be fair, such only as can command the investment of capital, and such, at least, as the Boston railroads have always yielded.

If the dependence is exclusively on the receipts from localities and places naturally and necessarily tributary to the road, regardless of other places having other outlets or means of transportation, which now monopolize their whole carrying trade, then it will be seen that their local receipts at present rates fall far short of the sum sufficient to pay a fair percentage on the investment.

In this exigency what is to be done ? Why clearly either the present rates on the regular local transportation ought to be increased to such amount as will

produce this compensation, or continuing the present local rates, other business, heretofore independent of this means of transportation, must be sought after, diverted and obtained in aid of the revenue necessary. For the continuation and permanency of the advantages and facilities afforded to the public by this work of improvement, one or the other of these alternatives should be chosen. Except as a last resort, the first would not be warrantable and would be the subject of just disapprobation, as indeed it should be, if we had the ability to legitimately use other means in acquiring revenue, and should disregard or neglect them. The chief dependence for this deficit would then be on the adoption of the other alternative, and to accomplish what this proposes we must enter into direct competition for this business, by establishing such rates of transportation as will reasonably promise success, or it could not be maintained; the effort would therefore become fruitless---*that* business would continue to flow into its original channel, contributing to us no revenue, or comparatively none, and thus the resort to an increased taxation of the local freights would appear unavoidable and imperative.

In my view then, both duty and policy dictate the course adopted in the establishment of the rates to Niles, to which you refer. For it is evident that it were better for all interested that we should take the freight of that section of the country, at even any

price above cost, than to loose the transportation of it altogether.

It would therefore be proper, under the circumstances mentioned, for us to enter into this competition, when the profits on the transportation of a barrel of flour from Niles to Detroit would be three cents only, and on other articles *pro-rata* ; but would it be contended that the rates which would yield such profits should be the standard of charges for transportation on the entire line of the road, when it is evident that this rate of profit would not yield one per cent on the capital invested, and which, therefore, would be equivalent to an absolute loss of nearly the whole capital.

The rates chargeable to Niles as fixed in that tariff, cannot, therefore, be reasonably made a criterion for those to be charged to Kalamazoo ; for upon the same principle on which these rates are made up, it would be proper, if necessary, to get that contingent business, to so reduce those rates as to obtain a profit of but four cents per barrel on flour, and the same rate of profit upon other business, even reckoning this profit as the excess of those receipts above the *increased* cost they create.

About one third of the operating expenses are not affected by the *amount* of business done. New business, therefore, can be taken against competition, at the exact average cost of regular business, and yield

one third of its receipts as nett profits ; or in other words, a profit can be made upon this contingent, or extra business, at a rate of charge *below* the actual cost upon the regular local business.

But it must be borne in mind, that all such contingent or extra business, is charged with the highest rates which will permit it to be obtained—although they must always be below a fair price—and which, of course, must range about even with those of the routes in competition ; and therefore the community furnishing such business, are far less benefitted by the Railroad than interior localities, to which the road affords an outlet, at greatly reduced rates.

It will then be evident, that if the same rates now fixed to Kalamazoo, were to be extended proportionally to Niles, we should fail to divert this business now foreign to our road, and the consequence would be, a total loss to us, without any equivalent benefit resulting to others.

Under such circumstances, and supposing the rates to Niles should be increased in the ratio contemplated, would we not have a just claim upon those—in accommodation of whose views, such rates should be established, for the fairly estimated amount of that loss ?

It is apparent, therefore, that a sound and judicious policy requires us to seek this contingent, or extra business from all sources, which will pay, either

directly, or indirectly, any profit whatever, and thus increase the earnings of the road ; rather than impose the whole burthen of taxation necessary for the support and continuance of the advantages and facilities it affords, upon the merely local and tributary freights.

One of the Railroads in New England, the principal business of which is carrying passengers, commenced experimentally, with a general charge of three cents per mile, which, it was soon ascertained, would barely pay expenses ; being in rivalry with a water route for through business, it was discovered that if the Railroad could take *through* passengers at 1 1-2 cents per mile, they could successfully compete, and with their local business, obtain a fair dividend on their investment. This course, or an increase of the rates on their regular local business to five cents per mile, were presented for their adoption, and they chose the first, secured a successful competition, and were thus enabled to continue their original local charges.

For similar reasons a like policy has been adopted on the Western Railroad in Massachusetts. On that road is charged a greater price for the transportation of a barrel of flour from Greenbush, 57 miles eastward, and to all interior stations east of that point, than is charged to Boston, a distance of 200 miles.

Under their tariff arrangement, which in this respect is somewhat similar to ours, the *through* freights

are practically the same as by the water route with which they are in competition ; they do not therefore afford any superior or extraordinary pecuniary advantages to either Boston or Albany—the points in competition—but only offer additional facilities ; leaving the interior stations to derive the direct pecuniary benefits of whatever reduction on the rates of transportation might be made from time to time by reason of the increased income derived by the Company from such competition---and it is to be further noticed, that while their charges for transportation fifty-seven miles are greater than for 200 miles, the average rates to Niles, 190 miles on our road, are about equalled at 123 miles.

The soundness and justice of the principle involved in this course of policy, has always been, and is invariably approved and adopted, wherever the like relative circumstances exist. For example, take the rates of the passenger tariff established by the proper authorities of this State as soon as this road was in a condition to invite the travel from Chicago, via. this inland route. By those rates the Illinois passenger was enabled to travel over this road from Kalamazoo to Detroit, at a less charge or cost than the Michigan passenger could from Battle Creek to Detroit, a much less distance. Or, the Chicago passenger was carried from Kalamazoo to Detroit for \$3,00, while the passenger from Kalamazoo was charged for

the same distance \$4,40, and this arrangement for the *through* travel, being the only one that could succeed, was wisely made as beneficial to the revenues of the road, and to the State at large, by inducing travel and business through its territory.

But unless a direct competition with the Lake route had been thus entered into, little or no revenue from the Chicago travel this way, could have been obtained, and the consequent loss must have induced the assessment of higher rates on the way, or local travel within the limits of the State, or it must have been borne without remedy.

Regarding this policy as the true one, we have therefore continued it in practice ; and no one within my knowledge has ever questioned its propriety, or censured its adoption. Yet upon the same principle, and for similar reasons, the reduced rates to Niles are established.

This general policy, and the motives which dictate its adoption, evidently therefore, are entitled to, and must receive the sanction and approval of all who consider the subject in its true light ; and it then remains only to determine whether the present rates chargeable to Kalamazoo and the other interior local stations, are reasonable and proper.

This question I propose to discuss on its own merits, and as a preliminary, I remark, that by the charter of this Company, we are authorized to

charge for the transportation of most of the leading articles of produce and merchandize, the average rates charged for the same on the Boston and Providence, Boston and Lowell, and Boston and Worcester Railroads---yet on nearly all these, and other prominent articles, (including flour and salt, to which you have alluded,) the rates we charge are below ; and on some of the staple articles of produce from Kalamazoo, less by nearly 50 per cent. than the average rates chargeable as aforesaid, and on Lumber we are authorized to charge 34 cents per 100 pounds, while our rates are but 14 cts.

The Railroad first mentioned has to contend with an outside water communication—a formidable rival ; the second is opposed by a parallel canal its entire distance ; and the third is in competition with wagon roads in the highest state of improvement.

The average tonnage of freight transported over these roads, is more than double the amount we shall carry upon ours, even when entirely completed ; and the average number of passengers taken by them, is something over four times as many as will be carried by us. Under such circumstances, and in view of the comparatively small amount of business done upon this road, our rates might with great reason and justice, be considerably higher than the average of those roads ; but when in anticipation of an increased business from the sources, where it is

expected to be obtained by the competition referred to, and for other reasons, we are induced to fix our local rates *below* those which we have a legal right to charge, I cannot believe that either our motives or our actions can justly become obnoxious to the censure of any portion of the community.

In continuation, I now invite your attention to the subjoined table, of the comparative average rates of transportation on certain prominent articles, as charged under the freight tariff established by the State authorities, and which was continued in force until the first day of July last ; and the rates chargeable for the same articles under the tariff established by us, and to which you refer.

I assume for the average in both cases, the rates charged, and those chargeable to Jackson, that being very nearly the central point between Detroit and Kalamazoo ; and this assumption is warranted by the estimate of our annual transportation business : and by this it will be clearly perceived that a very large reduction from the old rates has been made by the establishment of our new tariff.

TABLE OF COMPARATIVE RATES, for the transportation on the *M. C. Railroad*, of the articles hereinafter mentioned, with storage charges, showing the per centage of reduction from the tariff—established by the State Authorities, and continued in force until July 1st, 1848.

ARTICLES.	Rates Charged under State Tariff, and in force until July 1st, '48, with Shipping and Storage charges included.*	Rates chargeable under Tariff established by M. C. R. Co. which takes effect on 20th Aug. '48, with Storage charges included.†	Reduction from the State Tariff and in favor of present rates as fixed in Company's Tariff, mentioned in preceding column.
	AVERAGE.	AVERAGE.	
Flour per bbl.	51 cts.	38 cts.	25½ per cent.
Wheat per 100 lbs.	31 "	19 "	38¾ " "
Bran, shorts, coarse grains, per 100 lbs.	36 "	15 "	58½ " "
Salt per bbl.	71 "	50 "	29¾ " "
Iron, Nails, &c. per 100 lbs.	47 "	18 "	51¼ " "
Lumber per M.	\$5.62 "	\$3.27 "	41¼ " "
Plaster per 100 lbs.	33 "	12½ "	62 " "
Pig Iron to Detroit per 100 lbs.	30 "	14 "	53½ " "

* The commission charges of 2 1-2 per cent usually allowed to forwarding houses on the advancement of back charges, is not included in this column; an addition of these would increase the percentage of reduction, as the Company pay back charges without commission.

† The storage charges included in this column, are for goods lying in the Freight Depots of the Company at Detroit, and in the interior, *four days*; if shipped or taken away within twenty-four hours after their arrival in Detroit, which a large portion would be, or four days afterwards in the interior, no such charge is incurred, and the percentage of reduction will then be increased, while if they remain in the depots more than four days, a small additional storage charge will be made, which will diminish the rate of said per centage very slightly.

Here it will be seen that the cost of transportation and other contingent charges on the prominent articles above enumerated, which was incurred and required to be paid by the parties in interest, up to the 1st of July, 1848, have been lessened and reduced from 25 to 62 per cent. respectively, by our

present tariff of rates, and by reason of the superior advantages we afford in receiving, storing and shipping property, which we have only been able to do by an expenditure exceeding a quarter of a million of dollars, in the erection of commodious and suitable Freight depots ; and it is especially gratifying to know that all these reductions of the rates chargeable on agricultural products, most eminently and directly benefit the *producer*, while equal benefits, in a corresponding ratio, must indirectly accrue to the consumer, on account of the reductions on other articles of general merchandize.

This exhibit is its own exponent ; it certainly does not show a disregard of the public interests, but it proves, in my opinion, most conclusively, that our present rates and prices are reasonable and proper ; and this fact being established, in connection with another, that by unremitting efforts, and at a great outlay of money, for the accommodation of the public, we are enabled to furnish superior necessary facilities either gratuitously, or at comparatively very low charges, I submit, that it is all that you, or any other portion of the community should demand, or will require of us.

With due deference to your views, then, Gentlemen, I may be allowed to say, that, admitting our charges to Kalamazoo to be fair and reasonable, the lesser rates chargeable to Niles ought not to be a

subject of complaint with you ; for it is evident that at least no injustice has been done, in this respect, to your location.

In the foregoing I have discussed in general terms, the merits of the policy upon which the establishment of the present rates is founded, and have in illustration candidly stated the reasons and motives which have governed in its adoption : and I now again revert to your communication for the purpose of considering your statement as to the effect of the same upon the agricultural and commercial interests of Kalamazoo and Niles respectively.

You say, "The freight on flour from this place (Kalamazoo) to Detroit is fixed at 60 cents per barrel, while from Niles it is 40 cents ; this difference is equal to 5 cents per bushel on wheat, which is made to operate as so much loss to the producer." The average charge to Niles is about 51 cents and should therefore be substituted for 40 cents, in the comparison to be made ; the difference then is 2 cents per bushel on wheat, but whatever this difference may be, it cannot affect the pecuniary interests of the producer as will be hereafter shown.

Our present rates to Niles, have been fixed as nearly equal with the cost of the water transportation which is our rival there, as we were able to determine. You however remark, "Could we send our flour from this place to Niles at the same rate (in

proportion to distance as is charged from Niles to Detroit) and there avail ourselves of water communication, we could put our flour into market at less cost than by Rail Road to Detroit as is proposed by the present tariff.”

You thus seem to suppose that our rates to Niles are *above* the cost of that water transportation, as you propose by a special reduction of rates from Kalamazoo to Niles, to go there and avail yourselves of our water rival.

Now if our rates to Niles are materially below their old charges by water, you as well as ourselves have misjudged, which may be true in this early experimental stage of the subject.

On the other hand having done nothing to injure or impair the Detroit or Eastern market to which the whole produce goes, we have increased the value of Kalamazoo products just the amount of the reduction we have made in the rates of transportation and cost of other facilities, between the producer and the consumer, which upon wheat is 9 cents, and on coarse grains 18 cents per bushel.

It must therefore be obvious, I think, that the completion of the road to Niles, and the establishment of the lesser rates to that place, does not afford them the ability to pay as much increased price for wheat, as our reduced rates to Kalamazoo raise the value of it there ; the result of which, instead of

being a loss of 5 cents, is a clear gain of 9 cents on wheat, per bushel, to the Kalamazoo producer.

Among the principal causes of the increased value given to *village property* at Niles, by the extension of the rail road to that point, are the commercial and mercantile advantages arising from, or incident to its peculiar location ; but this fact cannot affect materially the value of property in the village of Kalamazoo, while the construction of this road, as well as the late reduction of the rates of freight, storage, &c., as is above shown, affect quite as beneficially the agricultural property of Kalamazoo county, as it does that in the vicinity of Niles.

You further remark, “ This difference in freight if insisted upon, will lessen the value of real estate in this county and vicinity, more than double the value or expense of the road through the entire county.”

Upon further consideration, the incorrectness of these premises will, I think, be clearly apparent.

If the wheat of Berrien and Cass counties could be transported to New York city free of charge to them, I am still unable to see how that fact would reduce the value of real estate in Kalamazoo county, and its vicinity : for the staple productions of those counties are not peculiar to their localities, exclusively.

The same products are raised throughout a large portion of the United States, of Europe, and the rest of the world.

The markets of the world are common to all, the fluctuations in prices affecting equally the whole, thus the entire system is kept in equilibrium, and the increased facilities which might be afforded to any one county in this State, would no more reduce the value or price of wheat in the rest of the State, than if the same facilities had been furnished to a like district of country on the shores of the Mediterranean.

I have thus offered such explanations as a full understanding of the subject seemed to demand ; from which the following general propositions are deducible :

1st. The capital necessary to answer the requirements of the Company's charter, is greater than the entire local business from places necessarily tributary to the road, can pay a fair income upon, at the rates of charges in the tariff referred to.

2nd. But about two thirds of the operating expenses are directly increased with the increase of business, and therefore the cost properly to be estimated against new business, which has other outlets as rivals to the road, is but two-thirds the average cost of the whole, and thus it is fair to estimate that *a profit* may be obtained on such business, though the price received for it be only *equal* to the average *cost* of the whole ; but if the local business be done at the same rate, it is clear that the entire capital of the company would be lost.

3rd. The whole State, and more especially that

portion of it necessarily tributary to the road, are equally interested with the Company in having all the business done upon it, which can be procured, when it will yield any profit whatever, as it all tends to increase the ability of the company to keep down, or reduce its local rates, and benefits the State at large by inducing business through its territory.

4th. As the business done against the competition of rival routes, though taken at rates below a fair price, is charged as high as those routes will carry for, the pecuniary advantages rendered to the people who furnish it, are far less than those rendered to interior localities, where the railroad charges are greatly lower than any other means of transportation.

5th. It is only in anticipation that under the policy adopted, a very considerable amount of receipts may be obtained from this new or contingent business, or *that* not directly tributary to the road, that the people in the interior of this State are enabled to enjoy the benefits of one of the best Railroads in the country, at reasonable charges, while from the comparative scarcity of population and business along its line, they furnish but a small portion of the revenue adequate to its support.

6th. The rates which the Company charge, especially upon agricultural productions, are considerably below those charged by the State; the facilities they offer are much greater and at less cost, and the gross

income which they will require, from economy of management, much less, in proportion to the capital they are required to invest, than when the road was purchased of the State.

7th. The policy adopted by the Western Railroad in Massachusetts, and all others similarly situated throughout the country, as well as by the authorities of this State in its passenger business, is similar to our own; and being the only one that promises success, doing injustice to none, and directly or indirectly benefiting all, is therefore the only true and proper one.

8th. The local rates charged over this road upon the principal articles of freight, are far below what they were under the State, and below the average of three of the oldest Railroads in New England, whose average business is from two to four times as much as upon this road, and are therefore fair and reasonable.

9th. Any increased facilities offered to Niles and its vicinity by the construction of the road to that place, cannot reduce the value of lands or products in Kalamazoo, or any other county in the State, any more than the construction of the road to Kalamazoo, and the late reduction of rates had that effect on lands or products at Niles, or elsewhere; nor can any injury be inflicted upon either, unless the common market be impaired, or the cost of transportation thereto be increased. The value of the agricultural

property of Kalamazoo County has not, therefore, been reduced, but has been increased just the amount of the late reduction of rates.

Allow me now, in conclusion, to say, that among the considerations which influenced the establishment of the present freight tariff in question, a proper regard for the public interests generally, and for local and individual accommodation, were equally prominent, with the attention due to the pecuniary profits and business of this Company ; for I am aware that the success of this enterprise depends mainly on the prosperity of the community interested in the advantages and facilities which it affords—mutual benefits are thus the result, and the interests of each are therefore identical.

Entertaining such views, I have at all times endeavored to regulate and conduct such of the affairs of the company, as have been committed to my superintendence in strict conformity therewith ; and influenced by those considerations it is demonstratively certain, that under all the circumstances, the policy alluded to is the only one that could be adopted and successfully maintained, and is calculated to secure the desired results in the best practicable manner. I therefore rest in the belief that when it is fully understood—surveyed as a whole, and taken in the range which it embraces, it cannot be justly obnoxious to censure, as injuriously affecting the rights

or interests of any location, or portion of community ; but will be approved as tending to secure the general benefits contemplated, and in the manner most feasible and proper.

This being evident, then the present rates should be continued as they are, until the same policy would seem to indicate or require their alteration.

It will not therefore, be considered necessary for me to reply in detail to the several interrogatories proposed in the last part of your letter, as sufficiently explicit answers to them all will be found in this communication, which I respectfully present, and I confidently rely on your intelligence and integrity for a justification of our motives and actions—into which we at all times invite the closest scrutiny, and which are involved in the subject of this discussion.

I am Gentlemen, Respectfully

Your Ob't. Serv't.

J. W. BROOKS,

Superintendent.